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“Skin-deep Modernity”: A Study of Hindi *Nayi Kahani* Authors as Deleuzian Writer-Physicians

By

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THESIS

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"Skin-deep Modernity": A Study of Hindi *Nayi Kahani* Authors as Deleuzian Writer-Physicians

Meher Gandhi

Abstract

This project is a study of Hindi *nayi kahani* (New Story) writers' diagnosis of modernity and middle-class experience in 1970. I present an in-depth analysis of interviews, published in Hindi little magazine *Sarika*, of four stalwarts of the movement: Mannu Bhandari, Rajendra Yadav, Bhisham Sahni, and Nirmal Verma. I contend that Deleuze's metaphor "writers are physicians" applies to these writers as they point out significant symptoms of "skin-deep modernity," as Bhandari puts it. Further, I analyze Mannu Bhandari's novel *Apka Bunty* (Your Bunty), published in 1971, to suggest that these symptoms are embodied in the child protagonist Bunty who navigates his relationship with his divorced parents and the world at large. I propose that this character is best understood as a swiveling protagonist who is incapable of causing any significant change to his environment and is rendered an utterly passive figure by surrounding forces. In this way, he is a symbol of the modern citizen whom the writers diagnose as eternally insecure, fearful, and lonely.

Introduction

Health as literature, as writing, consists in inventing a people who are missing. It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people. (...) This is not exactly a people called upon to dominate the world. It is a minor people, eternally minor, taken up in a becoming-revolutionary.[1]

In the charged atmosphere of 1970, twenty-three years after India's independence, prominent Hindi writers associated with the influential *nayi kahani* (New Story) movement grappled with the complexities of modernity as experienced by the nation's burgeoning middle class. Figures like Mannu Bhandari (1931-2021), Rajendra Yadav (1929-2013), Nirmal Verma (1929-2005), and Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003) diagnosed a pervasive malaise: a sense among middle-class individuals of being passive observers of their own lives, unable to engage with modernity beyond a superficial, "skin-deep" level. Through interviews published in the Hindi little magazine *Sarika* in 1970, these writers lamented what they saw as the middle class's failed attempts at genuine transformation and the lack of authentic literary representation of their specific suffering—a condition caught between the aspiration for progress and the persistent pull of tradition.

This project argues that the *nayi kahani* writers, acting metaphorically as diagnosticians of their time, effectively identified the post-independence middle-class condition as one of profound developmental arrest. As Deleuze observed, '(...) the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man.'[2] The writers' critiques, articulated in the *Sarika* interviews,

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

[2] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

portray the middle-class subject—the "man" merged with the symptoms of the world's "illness"—as akin to a child: sponge-like, eternally reactive to external pressures (like tradition, symbolized by parent-figures), and ultimately incapable of initiating self-directed progress or significant change.[3] This state aligns with Deleuze's concept of an "eternally minor" people, trapped in a cycle of insufficient rebellion and superficial identification with a modernity they cannot fully inhabit.[4] I contend that this specific diagnosis of middle-class "minor-ness" finds its most compelling literary embodiment in the child protagonist Bunty from Mannu Bhandari's 1971 novel, *Apka Bunty* (Your Bunty).[5]

By first examining the critical perspectives offered by Bhandari, Yadav, Sahni, and Verma in their *Sarika* interviews, this study reconstructs their collective "table of symptoms" for the middle-class dilemma.[6] Analyzing these interviews allows us to grasp the contemporary

[3] On the usage of "man": I use he/him to refer to the writer/citizen throughout this project for three reasons: (i) the majority of the protagonists crafted in this male-dominated literary scene are males, (ii) the child protagonist of the novel I analyze is male, (iii) the female-coded experience of both modernity and middle-class living is a nuanced version distinct from the male-coded experience. All the cited writers, including Deleuze, use "man"/pronoun "he" to refer to their subject in general.

[4] This is not to suggest that Deleuze is using "minor" to refer to a child-like figure. I posit the child protagonist as a symbol of the modern citizen who is unable to effect substantial amelioration of his suffering.

[5] The publisher of Mannu Bhandari's book transliterates the title from Hindi (आपका बंटी) to English as "Aapka Banti." However, I will use "Apka Bunty" for better accuracy.

[6] 'There is always a great deal of art involved in grouping symptoms, in the organization of a *table* where a particular symptom is dissociated from another, juxtaposed to a third, and forms the new figure of a

views of these writers on modernity, social change, and the perceived failings of the literary scene to capture this specific form of existential distress.[7] This analysis moves beyond Hindi literary scholarship which prioritizes the *nayi kahani* writers' short stories, by centering on these less-examined interviews alongside a close reading of a major novel.

Subsequently, the project demonstrates how *Apka Bunty* manifests the very symptoms diagnosed by the writers. Bunty, as a child navigating the emotional fallout of his parents' separation, embodies the condition of being "unneeded, unwanted," as Bhandari herself notes. He becomes a figure for the "eternally minor" in two senses: literally a child dependent on adults, and metaphorically a secondary figure whose subjectivity and suffering are overlooked.[8] Through a sequential reading that traces Bunty's intensifying experience, I explore how Bhandari portrays his struggle with this "minor" status and his attempts to forge a self amidst adult indifference. While the interviews offer a more detached, diagnostic perspective, the novel provides a visceral, palpable immersion in the "delirium" of modernity and, as Bhandari herself puts it, of being rendered invisible and ineffective—a literary act aimed at writing *for* the "missing people" trapped in this condition.

Hindi scholarship has extensively defined both the writer's perspective on society and the *nayi kahani* movement through the writers' short stories. There is, however, more to be said of the novel. For this reason, I focus on a few of the many interviews published in one of the

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disorder or illness.' Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, quoted in Charles J. Stivale, *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

[7] From hereon, I will use "the writers" to refer to the interviewees Mannu Bhandari, Rajendra Yadav, Bhisham Sahni, and Nirmal Verma.

[8] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 4.

several little magazines, and further the conversation by reading one of the tens of novels written by one of the six most widely known proponents of the movement. The interviews conducted by interviewers Ashok Agrawal and Sudarshan Narang were published in *Sarika*, a Hindi little magazine edited by another *nayi kahani* writer, Kamleshwar Prasad Saxena. Eric Bulson's essay, "Little Magazine, World Form," emphasizes on the role of little magazines in creating 'a decentered literary universe' in the twentieth century. He asserts that 'behind the route of every magazine is a transnational history of modernity waiting to be uncovered, a space in which the global ambitions of writers and critics became a reality, if only for a moment, before the form moved in other directions.'[9] Francesca Orsini's work on Hindi little magazines suggests a complex relationship between magazines and world literature as Hindi magazines engaged in a 'nation-building effort.' She presents Hindi magazines from 1950s and 1970s as 'remarkable sites of literary activism' which 'thrive on short forms' such as short stories.[10]

A project such as mine benefits from the interviews published in *Sarika* because they capture an acute moment in Hindi literary history, where writers are radically in favor of doing away with literary and other social traditions that do not serve their current needs. For a scholar of *nayi kahani*, these interviews are a critical source for analyzing the movement in a way that transcends retrospective approaches. An interview-based analysis such as this can neither be historiographical nor decontextualized. To grasp the literary world as lived in by its stalwarts,

[9] Eric Bulson, "Little Magazine, World Form", in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford University Press, 2012), 267, 285.

[10] Francesca Orsini, "Literary Activism: Hindi magazines, the Short Story and the World," in *The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form*, ed. Francesca Orsini, Neelam Srivastava and Laetitia Zecchini (Open Book Publishers, 2022), 101-102.

this analysis must risk treading on a border between our critical reconfigurations of the past and a reportage of the "then".

In her author's note to *Apka Bunty*, Mannu Bhandari observes,

> वस्तुतः उपन्यासकार के लिए अप्रतिरोध चुनौती, सहानुभूति और मानवीय करुणा के केंद्र सिर्फ़ वे ही लोग हो पाते हैं, जो कहीं न कहीं फ़ालतू हो गए हैं।[11]
>
> In truth, for a novelist, only those people end up as centers of irresistible challenge, sympathy and compassion, who have become unneeded, unwanted.[12]

Being-minor, being-unwanted, is a symptom of the delirious state of the Indian individual. I argue that Mannu Bhandari carefully attends to this delirium through the character of Bunty who, as a child, is socially defined as incapable of causing any lasting change in his world. Thus, he is 'eternally minor,' in the form of a child who is almost completely dependent on adults around him and is treated as a secondary figure by them.[13] My interest does not lie in how Bunty is treated, just as the writers do not focus on how the Indian citizen is treated by the previous generation. Rather, I focus on how Bunty explores his selfhood and faces the 'eternally minor' in him. Despite the temporal, geographical, and cultural distance between the two, I find resonances between Bhandari's view of the unneeded and Deleuze's statements on literature which are far too compelling to be ignored. Compare Bhandari's insight above with Deleuze's observation: 'The ultimate aim of literature is (...) To write for this people who are missing…("for" means less "in the place of" than "for the benefit of").'[14] Bhandari writes, and the writers speak, *of* the

[11] Mannu Bhandari, *Aapka Banti* (Radhakrishan Prakashan Pvt. Limited, 1971), x.

[12] All translations from Hindi to English are mine.

[13] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 4.

[14] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 4.

"missing" child and *for* the ones who have crossed the threshold of presence to become so present, hyper-present, that their existence is treated as a given. They become invisible entities, floating and suffering, in a world which they fail to affect, to bend, to mold.

Part I

The Interviews

स्किन-डीप मॉडर्निटी. बस एक झीनी-सा आवरण है जो आधुनिकता का भ्रम जरूर पैदा कर देता है.[15]

Skin-deep modernity. A net-like covering that gives the illusion of modernity.

In this part of my project, I collate and assess interviews of Mannu Bhandari, Bhisham Sahni, Nirmal Verma, and Rajendra Yadav published in the magazine *Sarika* in 1970. These interviews emphasize the dynamic relationship between the writer and his society along with the former's passivity and inconsequentiality in bringing about any change in this relationship.

Inherited Restrictions and Illusory Freedom

A recurring concept, particularly highlighted by Mannu Bhandari, is that of "Skin-deep modernity", envisaged as a net-like covering that gives the illusion of modernity. Bhandari attacks the popular understanding of modernity to insist that only the one who is free from traditions is the one with a modern view.[16] The rest of us, she implies, are only afforded a substandard experience of 'skin-deep modernity.' The superficiality of a blotched sense of being modern is what makes this modernity skin deep. Despite the pervasive quality of Bhandari's

[15] Mannu Bhandari, "Interview", interview by Sudarshan Narang and Ashok Agarwal, *Sarika*, 1970: 85.

[16] "जो सही अर्थों में संस्कारों से मुक्त हो", Bhandari, interview: 85.

diagnosis of the modern experience, her definition is tethered to gender unlike the definitions provided by her contemporaries. She posits that modernity is a marred concept celebrated by a large population of men in patriarchal systems while their female counterparts bear the brunt of this shoal modernity.

While Bhandari perceives modernity's gendered complexities, Bhisham Sahni views modernity solely from the vantage point of a literary figure. He emphasizes on the lack of artistic representations of conflicts that the artist faces in his time.

> बदलते परिवेश में मनुष्य और समाज के जीवन में पाये जाने वाले अंतर-विरोधों को महसूस करना और उन्हें कला के स्तर पर वस्तुपरक और विश्वसनीय रूप में व्यक्त कर पाना ही मेरी नज़र में आधुनिकता है. (...) गढ़ी-गढ़ायी मान्यताओं को अपना लेना आधुनिकता नहीं है. लेखक केवल इसी अर्थ में आधुनिक होता है जिस अर्थ में वह अपने कल के अंतर-विरोधों को महसूस करने की क्षमता रखता है.[17]
>
> To feel the conflicts found in a person and society's life in the changing milieu and to be able to represent them through art in material and reliable forms is modernity in my view. (...) To accept ancient beliefs is not modernity. The writer is only modern when he is capable of feeling the conflicts within his own time.

His definition is born out of a need to qualify the literary movement he participates in. Modernity then, for Sahni, is an experience of continual 'change' supported by its continual representation in art. However, to experience modernity is not simply to experience transience. Such an experience can also manifest itself in the form of numbness and inactivity, a submission to 'ancient beliefs'. Rather, to experience modernity is to 'feel the conflicts' that arise as a result of the very transience that defines it.

Similarly to Sahni and Bhandari, Nirmal Verma's perception of modernity is marked by his lamentation over pseudo-modernity. This illusion of modernity is characterized by the

[17] Bhisham Sahni, "Interview," interview by Sudarshan Narang and Ashok Agarwal, *Sarika*, 1970: 86.

people's desire for material markers of an elevated, even luxurious, experience while they fail to address their social regression. Verma approaches modernity, middle class, and *nayi kahani* (New Story) through a comparative lens, shedding light on the western gaze. He draws on the experiences of middle-class Indian writers and pits them against the experiences of Western writers. In his view, the Western writers are far more adept at embracing modernity than Indian writers. In the interview, his experience living in Europe is assumed to grant him credibility over discussions on how Indian modernity and the Hindi literary scene differ from the European experience. As I explain later, his take on modernity is that its experience for the middle-class Indian is rife with suffering and it is precisely this suffering that the writer unfortunately fails to express.

Rajendra Yadav's interview gives us a different perspective on what constitutes a middle-class writer's experience of modernity. He leads with his individual existentialist experience (internal) to reflect on the social world (external). The internal/external divide is abstracted as his self is the component of a larger body comprising many individuals i.e. his *immediate* social world. His diagnosis of himself stands for his diagnosis of the world—the professional world of writers and artists and the world of the nation grappling with modernity.

In order to better comprehend Yadav's diagnosis of Indian modernity and the symptoms identified by the other writers, we must examine their takes on the role of traditions. While Bhandari and Yadav focus on traditions as generally understood (social and cultural, customary, inherited systems of belief), Verma and Sahni are more concerned with literary traditions. It is notable however, that their exposition of literary traditions is symbolic of the larger, social dimension which interests Bhandari and Yadav. I emphasize here that in their interviews, there is no clarification as to what these traditions comprise. But scholarship on *nayi kahani* movement

gives us a better idea of the same. For instance, in her work on the New Story movement and its short stories, Preetha Mani notes, 'They [New Story writers] felt that older generation writers held omniscient control over characters, clinging to an old-fashioned understanding of reality, even though conditions had changed.'[18] Thus, these traditions encompass literary traditions that the writers find themselves restricted by. Additionally, we can infer from the writers' comments in the interviews that by "traditions" they are actively referring to general, social practices and beliefs of their immediate world. As the writers point out, these include the traditional means of arranged marriages and judgement of social status based on language, luxuries, etc. which lead to generational conflicts within the middle class.

The writer who is critiqued by the writers consistently represents the Indian middle-class individual. Yadav reflects on inherited restrictions and superficial progress and articulates a profound dissatisfaction with prevailing social norms:

> बात यह है कि जिस परिवेश में हम जीने के लिए अभिशप्त हैं या समाज के जिस ढांचे में हम पनप रहे हैं, वह बहुत अधिक संकीर्णताग्रस्त है और समूचा मानव-समूह बिना किसी विरोध, अंकुशों को मौन सहने का जिस तरह आदि हो गया है, उससे वितृष्णा होती है. संस्कृति और संस्कारों के नाम पर हमपर अनेकानेक स्थूल बातें थोप दी जाती हैं और हम कभी दूसरों की प्रसन्नता की खातिर और कभी तीक्षण आत्म-विश्वास की कमी के कारण उन पिटी मान्यताओं को निभाने का स्वांग किये चले जाते हैं.[19]
>
> The milieu in which we are cursed to live or the framework in which we are growing is very narrow and the way in which entire humanity is habituated to tolerating the restrictions without any resistance disgusts me. In the name of culture and traditions, many crude ways are imposed upon us and we, sometimes for the sake of keeping others

[18] Preetha Mani, *The Idea of Indian Literature* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), 108.

[19] Rajendra Yadav, "Interview", interview by Sudarshan Narang and Ashok Agarwal, *Sarika*, 1970: 85.

> happy and sometimes because of a lack of acute self-trust, continue to mimic upholding the olden beliefs.

Yadav understands modernity to stem from progress which he characterizes as "the flux of values." Like his contemporaries, Yadav locates the superficiality of progress—modernity mistaken—in the tradition-based roots that cling to "us"; the values that one inherits from the previous generations yet must not be carried along as principally unchanging, ever-guiding truths. He reflects on the pretense of being modern, observing that "we" can only argue against traditions, which are emphatically unhelpful in modern day struggles, but not pragmatically follow through our arguments. This pretense is also undertaken by writers who, in Yadav's view, can present themselves as rebellious on all fronts except for literary; they cannot express their rebellion through their literary work.

This failure in literary expression is fervently echoed by Verma who views Indian young (middle class) writers suffering from enticing Western advertisements of modern lifestyles. Verma states:

> भारतीय युवा लेखक समूचे तथाकथति विद्रोहात्मक नारों के बावजूद भी ऐसी संस्कृति की उपज है जिसमें मध्य वर्ग का वह अकेलापन है जो सामंतवादी संस्कारों से बंधा हुआ है. यही कारण है कि उसके लेखन में वह भयंकर यातना और पीड़ा नहीं मिलती है. वह सिर्फ आधुनिक बनने की सोचता है. जिस दिन वह पश्चिमी आधुनिकता के सतहीपन को पहचान जायेगा, वह अनायास 'आधुनिकता' के मोह से मुक्त हो जायेगा.[20]
>
> In spite of all the so-called rebellious slogans, the Indian young writer is a product of such an upbringing in which the loneliness of the middle class is tied to feudalist traditions. This is the reason why one cannot find the terrifying affliction and suffering in

[20] Nirmal Verma, "Interview", interview by Sudarshan Narang and Ashok Agarwal, *Sarika*, 1970: 85.

his writing. The day he recognizes the superficiality of Western modernity, he will immediately become free from the illusion of "modernity."

Verma does not bring the middle class into the conversation except for this moment when he diagnoses it to be lonely and tied to its past. In using the word 'feudalist' (सामंतवादी), he locates the roots of traditions that continue guiding the modern writer in pre-independence, colonized India. This suggests that loneliness is at the heart of the middle-class experience and is the cause of the Indian middle class individual's timidity in the face of traditions and "ancient" belief systems, which eventually weigh him down.

Verma and his contemporaries suggest that instead of focusing on what will truly make them modern i.e. their recognition of the futility of long-held customs, the young writers in India continue to invest in flamboyant symbols of progress, treating them as 'means of freedom'[21]. As these symbols become celebrated as markers of modernity, the individual becomes trapped in the illusion they fester. Verma thus considers the entire concept of modernity misleading, much like Bhandari who categorizes modern experience as a superficial sense of modernity on the one hand and a palpable break from traditions on the other.

Verma thus considers the entire concept of modernity misleading, much like Bhandari who categorizes modern experience as a superficial sense of modernity on the one hand and a palpable break from traditions on the other. This discussion on the necessity of a break from "feudalist" traditions is furthered by Bhandari. She gives real life examples to expose how men and women act out of a distorted sense of "freedom" from the past. Her succinct definition of modernity, as presented above, is followed by an example of young men who misuse the idea of being free from traditions. In affairs with young women, they seek the comfort of a "modern"

[21] "मुक्ति का साधन," Verma, interview: 85.

worldview but in marriage, they seek women from traditionally well-to-do families. When married, the men seek a certain kind of liberation that is not afforded to women. According to Bhandari, this fraud is continued in the name of "being modern". This is a symptom of 'skin-deep modernity,' as Bhandari calls this illusory case of modernity. She also reflects on women who are guided by a traditional sense of womanhood, their identity being reduced to pitiful objects. Modernity's shallow depth which is understood as the unstable bonelessness of being modern is all that is offered to a woman who is pursued by, and the woman who is married off, to a man.

For the most part in her interview, Bhandari oscillates between the modern experiences of women, women characters, and her own as a writer. But there is also a beyond-the-gender moment. Her commentary on the middle class and its attachment to traditions reinforces her clear diagnosis of the social world which coincides with the diagnoses provided by the other writer-interviewees: that the modern men and women are fearful, insecure, and alone. However, her comments on the middle class are interjected by the interviewers' questions on what is deducible about female behavior based on Bhandari's stories. Though this takes away from us the opportunity to better understand her stance on the pseudo-modernity of the middle class, we are still able to gather a gendered view of modernity that other interviewees couldn't offer in as much detail.

Sahni does not outrightly dismiss this 'upbringing' and the previous generation's ways of writing (and being) as entirely impractical. Sahni's insistence on noticing the complexities of "old" and "new", "traditional" and "modern" is followed by his observation that writers who are claiming "new" and "modern" are in a rush to be known for their novelty, when in fact they can

never be isolated from the past that has raised them.[22] He instead dismisses the concept of periodization in its entirety:

> (...) लेखकों का छाती ठोंक कर अपने आप को इस या उस कालावधि में रखना मुझे बेमानी-सा लगता है. (...) एक ओर उपदेशात्मक तो दूसरी ओर आदर्शवादी प्रवृति के प्रभाव से हम बहुत कुछ निकल आये हैं. यथार्थ चित्रण अधिक व्यापक हुआ है. प्रयोगों की भरमार रही है. पर उत्कृष्ट रचनाएँ फिर भी उंगलिओं पर ही गिनी जा सकती हैं. दूसरी ओर हमारा कहानी-साहित्य अधिक शहरी, किताबी और सेकेंड हैंड भी हुआ है. दिशाहीनता, मूल्यहीनता, एकाकीपन की बातें मुझे यहां लागू होती दिखाई नहीं देतीं.[23]
>
> I consider it unfair if the author is convinced of belonging to one or the other period. (...) The instructive tendencies on the one hand and the idealist on the other have impacted us in many ways. Realist presentations have also gained traction. Experimental works are in abundance. But excellent works are only countable on fingers. On the other end, our story-literature (*kahani*) has been very influential. Loss of direction and worth do not apply here.

Here, Sahni distinguishes the *kahani* writer from all instructive, idealist, and realist writers on the basis of being more committed and worthy of recognition. This suggests an embedded and internalized criticism that the writer associates as emanating from the more prominent "ism"-based factions of writers, critics, and perhaps even readers. Sahni's defensive tone marks the *nayi kahani* outlook. However, this defense is not consistent with his and his contemporaries' accounts of the present state of the writers.

The Modern Writer's Predicament: Inspiration, Representation, and Reality

[22] Sahni, interview: 86.

[23] Sahni, interview: 85.

I will now turn to the symptoms associated with the malady of modernity as it pervades the literary landscape. This understanding is crucial for grasping the intense insecurity, instability, and loneliness that the writer, a representative of the Indian middle class, experiences.

Bhandari expresses a sense of futility in writing amidst global turmoil:

> हर विचारधारा की क्रूरतम परिणतियां, संसार के अलग-अलग कोनों में होने वाले अमानुषिक हिंसा-कांड--विज्ञान और राजनीती की धुरी पर घूमती इस दुनिया में कहानी लिखना बड़ा निरर्थक लगने लगा है.[24]
>
> Every ideology's cruel consequences, inhumane violent acts in different parts of the world–it seems meaningless to write stories in this world rotating on the axis of science and politics.

When the interviewers ask Bhandari, a professor in Hindi at the time, about the lack of her writing in the latest magazine issues, her reply is direct: she hasn't written anything new. Her reasons are both external and internal. On the one hand, the violent world overwhelms her and she surrenders to the monotony of her life which divides her from entering a fertile ground of ideas. On the other hand is her harsh and reproachful internal critic who has replaced her recognition of the creator-self within. Despite being surrounded by a potential effervescent source of inspiration—the youthfulness of academia in the form of her students' lives—she finds no respite from the burden of no inspiration. She reflects on her inability to connect with her students' worlds:

> (...) पर इन्हें, इनके स्वप्न, इनकी आकांक्षाओं और समस्याओं को कहानी का विषय बनाने के लिए जरूरी है कि आप इन्हीं के स्तर पर उतर कर इनकी भावनाओं की सहभोक्ता हों, इनके साथ जिंदगी शेयर करें. पर ऐसा हो नहीं पता.[25]

[24] Bhandari, interview: 84.

[25] Bhandari, interview: 84.

> But they (her students), their dreams, their hopes and problems require you to step to their level and co-live their feelings, share their lives. But this doesn't happen.

The idea of cultivating empathy for writerly inspiration is problematized by Sahni. He draws on "imaginative sympathy" to emphasize the ability of the writer to conjure scenarios that have no material relation with the writer himself. This kind of writing, one that combines the work's closeness with the 'I' without discounting the impact second-hand experiences presents the writer's worldview, thus establishing a unique relationship with his social world. In Sahni's view, second-hand experiences—experiences of people removed from the writer—also count as an essential part of his subjective experience. Despite the proposition that the writer should not be restricted by his own experiences, this is not helpful for Bhandari. Bhandari points out the equally critical element of empathy which she cannot achieve when the age gap between the young students and herself as well as the limitations of the academic setting prevent her from "sharing" their lives. Bhandari simplifies the debate on the primacy of authentic experience, the need for a "proof of having experienced" the subject matter. It is an obstacle for any given writer but especially for a female writer whose closet of experiences is limited to difficulties in love life and inability to question limits placed upon her in the name of family values and traditions. But who is Bhandari speaking for? Given that her experiences as a writer outdo the set of female experiences she lays out, it is evident that she is relegating her individual writerly experience and elevating a collective *female* writerly experience. This adds a gendered dimension to the crash of the writer's literary expeditions—that she is a woman writing in a world that potentially continues to revere representations true to one's experience is the real hurdle. Before I present examples of how Sahni's solution fails to account for Bhandari's specific problem, let us look at Verma's comment to examine what the limited scope of experiences means for the Indian middle class. Verma observes:

> विदेशी लेखकों के अनुभव का दायरा अत्यंत विस्तृत है. अतः उनके यहां जीवन के विविध क्षेत्रों की कहानियां भी हैं. भारतीय लेखक का दायरा संकुचित है, इसमें मुझे कोई आपत्ति नहीं. वास्तविक ट्रेजेडी यह है कि वह अपने वर्तमान दायरे की वस्तुस्तिथि को ही ठीक ढंग से प्रस्तुत नहीं कर पा रहा है. वह अपने परिवेश और वातावरण की भीषणता, उसके दैन्य तथा भयवहपन को वास्तिविक रूप नहीं दे पाता.[26]
>
> The purview of Western writers' experience runs far and wide. Thus, they also have stories that map multiple realms of life. Indian writer's purview is narrow, I don't disagree. The real tragedy is that he [Indian writer] is not able to properly present the material reality of his current scope. He is not able to give a real form to the unpleasantness, poverty and frightening nature of his milieu and environment.

Verma lays out the difference in the range of experiences the Western writers and Indian writers are subjects of. This observation relates directly to Bhandari's comment on the limited purview of women writers. For him, this range is defined by Western writers, while Bhandari defines it by Indian male writers. Verma does not elaborate on the components of the expansive Western life that are missing in the Indian experience. Despite the ambiguity, he makes it clear that the paucity of distinct experiences cannot be used as an excuse for the writer's inability to write of his suffering. He does not find reason in excusing the unrepresented distressing material conditions despite the limits of Indian subjective experience. He makes a clear diagnosis of the Indian modern milieu: it is stricken with material, spiritual, and experiential poverty.

Bhandari's emphasis on the uninspiring monotony of a woman's life indicates her frustration at women characters written by male writers. Critiquing the male gaze in character depiction, she notes:

[26] Verma, interview: 87.

> नारी अपनी स्तिथियों में इतनी ज्यादा इन्वॉल्व रहती है कि चित्रण के लिए जो तटस्थता अपेक्षित है वह उसमें नहीं आ पाती. और वह असंतुलित हो जाती है. इस दृष्टि से पुरुषों द्वारा किया हुआ चित्रण ज्यादा संतुलित होता है.[27]
>
> A woman is so involved in her situations that the neutrality required for depiction [of characters] cannot be achieved. And she becomes unstable. In this view, female characters depicted by males are more stable.

Bhandari notes that the real-life counterparts of the female characters written by men are not as stable or empowered as they are written to be. In this way, Bhandari's approach towards presenting her characters is in stark contrast with her male contemporaries' approach. Instead of approaching women characters with neutrality, she finds the male writers are inept at suppressing their male gaze. She sees it as an obstacle in representing the instability of women when accounts of female experience are tainted with pity. True representation, for her, demands a different kind of neutrality:

> करुण-से-करुण प्रसंग को भी तो निहायत तटस्थ रह कर चित्रित किया जा सकता है, किया जाना चाहिए.[28]
>
> The most pitiful of accounts can also be illustrated with detachment, as they should be.

Here, the Hindi word *taṭasthā* (तटस्थ) can be translated as neutral or detached. However, its nuance suggests that one must muster up the strength to feel neutral toward a rather evocative and touching narrated event. Bhandari offers a glimpse into the value system underpinning her writing *for* women who are on the periphery of modern living. She upturns the gaze they are habituated to and writes for them with a particular kind of detachment.

[27] Bhandari, interview: 86.

[28] Bhandari, interview: 85.

As I mentioned earlier, Bhandari finds the symptoms of this failed project of modernity in the fearful and insecure state of the Indian middle class. Verma and Yadav however, go beyond the diagnosis to evaluate the lack of literary works that represent this suffocation faced by the middle class. Despite Verma's clear emphasis on the perceived shortcomings of Hindi literary figures compared to their English counterparts, he adds to this conversation a global perspective worth pondering, unaddressed by other interviewees.

> सबसे बड़ी बात पश्चिम के युवा लेखकों के साथ यह है कि वे सब कुछ त्याग कर साहित्य के माध्यम में कुछ पाना चाहते हैं, जबकि यहाँ का युवा लेखक साहित्य के माध्यम से ही सब कुछ पाना चाहता है.[29]
>
> The biggest thing about Western young writers is that they are willing to sacrifice everything to achieve something *in* [emphasis added] the means of literature, but the Indian young writer wants to achieve everything *through* [emphasis added] the means of literature.

According to Verma, Indian writers view their work as a ladder to reach a seemingly freedom-laden, *modern* lifestyle whereas the Western writers are more concerned with the social impact of their work. Writers of the West do not shy away from radical ways of writing in unprecedented ways and are well aware of the 'meaninglessness of the word "democracy"'. However, Indian writers are unable to tap into the depth of their suffering, which prevents their works from being established as effective modes of dissent. This writer's self-image is that of a modern citizen but his work does not represent any of the horrors he faces in his modern times. Verma, like others, blames the Indian writers' attachment to beliefs and traditions they have inherited from the past. The Western mind is aware of being dehumanized by economic forces, convincing the people to revolt against being treated as "cogs in a machine". He finds this awareness lacking in Indian writers. That the Indian writer is suffering but not representing his

[29] Verma, interview: 85.

suffering has serious implications for how his work is perceived on the global stage. This weak grasp over suffering debars the Indian writers' entry to being globally recognized. This leads Verma to note that foreign writers take Indian literature lightly.

However, I think it is notable that his comments do not justify the slippage in thinking of "young Indian writers" as a unit comprising members who share the same worldview with no outliers. To what extent, can the experiences of the writer-members be considered as coinciding and can their points of difference be neglected as easily? Even if we set aside the glaring multiplicity of the languages in which the Indian writers operate, the simplified dynamic between the Western writer and the Indian writer does not yield any significant, demonstrable differences.

As I pointed out earlier, the writers are simultaneously thinking about their role as a writer and their experience as a (middle class) Indian citizen. I will now present their definitions of the literary movement they are identified with, not to delve into a detailed discussion of the movement itself but rather to provide evidence for how the modern individual-writer is required to actively do away with socio-literary traditions.

Verma's definition of the New Story movement is central not only to the conversation between the interviewers and the interviewee but also to a concurrent, underlying conversation among the *nayi kahani* writers I include in this project. His reflections on the elusive "newness" and the *horrid almost* that modernity offers clearly impact his definition of the movement. He asserts:

> नयी कहानी वास्तव में नयी नहीं है. नयी कहानी अपने में एक पैराडॉक्स है. (...) नए लेखकों में परंपरा तोड़ने के प्रति सतर्कता नहीं है. (...) 'ज्ञात से पलायन' (डिपार्चर फ्रॉम समथिंग नोन) को आप परंपरा से

> कटना नहीं कहे, यह वह स्वाभाविक स्तिथि है जब लेखक अपने को पहचान कर परंपरा को खंडित करने की दिशा मैं अग्रसर होता है.[30]
>
> *Nayi kahani* is not really new. *Nayi kahani* is a paradox in itself. (...) New writers are not alert toward breaking tradition. (...) You shouldn't call "departure from the known" a break from tradition, this is a natural state occurring when the writer recognizes himself and moves toward fragmenting the tradition.

The term "departure from the known" exudes a sense of unimpactful authorial efforts. That the writer is always trying to but does not successfully accomplish an actual break from traditions is echoed by his earlier statement on how the writer suffers—and may even write about it—all to no avail. Although the New Story movement is named so to convey novelty, it is not new unless it truly achieves radically unprecedented effects. He mentions the Surrealist movement in poetry and Robbe-Grillet's opinions on novels to say that Western movements can be called literary propellers, but no Indian movement has achieved that success yet. He bolsters his take on what can be deemed "new" by delving into Sartre's understanding of the popular versus the new: if something is truly new, it is not easily digestible. Seemingly new things that gain popularity are often those already anticipated by the public. Verma's comments suggest that if we think of the *nayi kahani* movement as one that gains popularity over time, this reception brings to the surface a characteristic of the public: that citizens are ready to embody the spirit of protest but the scope of their protests ends right before any consequential action can be taken. This "horrid almost" is fervently embodied by the young Indian writer.

In charting the limitations of literary movements in general, Sahni casts suspicion on the writers' desire to be known for novelty, for their "new" stories. The New Story movement is conceived as the "modern" movement—modern being all that comprises the writer's own time

[30] Verma, interview: 86.

and present. This definition of modernity is agreed upon by the rest of the writers. Not only does it define modernity as a break from the past, it subtly associates the movement with the label 'modern', making it palatable for as many readers as possible. Yet the movement is similar to other literary movements with scope for better systems of communication between readers and writers. He holds that the scope of literary movements is narrow because there are only two key players on the field, the writer and the critic. The readers are shoved into oblivion despite their potential for deciding on whether or not a movement is successful in furthering its agenda. Sahni notes:

> जिस दायरे में ये आंदोलन चलते हैं, वह उत्तरोत्तर संकीर्ण होता जा रहा है. इस दायरे में पाठक-समूह की प्रतिकिया लेखक के लिए निर्णायक अभी तक नहीं बन पायी.[31]
>
> The scope of such movements is becoming increasingly narrow. In it, the readers' reaction has not been able to become a deciding factor for the writer.

This means that the reader's ideal role in contributing toward defining the movement is largely taken up by the critic. The writer is entrenched in the criticism his work receives. To please the critics, he makes authorial decisions that are not true to himself or his art. This is a critical condition for an author associated with a movement such as this where novels and short stories are crafted for a particular readership in mind—the *nayi kahani* stories cater largely to middle-class readers.[32] Thus, to be blocked from the opinions of the target audience is the first step in diluting the movement. Sahni is quick to comment that the critiques published in magazines

[31] Sahni, interview: 85.

[32] 'The middle class that postindependence modernist realism envisioned was not the more sure-footed one of today. On the contrary, it was a category constituted by its own unmooring from the certainties and traditions of the colonial past.' Mani, *The Idea of Indian Literature*, 122.

(presumably such as *Sarika*, *Nayi Kahaniyan*, and *Kahani* among others) are not consequential in building any writer's reputation. However, the literary system in which critics are heavily involved is potent enough to weaken the current state of Hindi literature as more and more writers compromise on the essence of their work for critics' applause. In this situation, the *nayi kahani* writer is made hypervigilant by the hostile literary environment. If he dares to write in interruptive ways, he is met with harsh criticism in inhospitable discursive environments. Sahni reports that only a few writers are in stable positions with respect to their work. These few writers define the moment's literary pulse. A rather bleak state such as this pushes the writers to become hyper-fixated on critical acclaim. According to Sahni:

> लेखक तब चुकता है जब वह साहित्य-सृजन को भूल कर समाज में अपनी पोजीशन बनाने में लग जाय, जब स्वयं सीखने के बजाये दूसरों को सिखाने लगे, जब वह वादों की बहसों में उलझ कर अपना संवेदन खो बैठे.[33]
>
> A writer falls short when he forgets literary creation for creation of his "position" in society, when he stops learning and starts teaching, when he becomes occupied with debates between factions and loses his own perception.

This insecurity over losing his writerly prestige separates the writer from the literary cause he started out with. Thus, he continues to uphold established and appreciated literary traditions to maintain his position as a reliable literary figure, even if the traditions do not suit his contemporary struggle. Sahni suggests that there is another way to discern the relationship between the present and the past: novel ways of narrativization—innovations in literary techniques and movements—do not come about in merely a decade. This implies that literary movements cannot be thought of as upgrades of one another. Though these developments are

[33] Sahni, interview: 84.

themselves products of modernity and are aimed at unprecedented causes, the intentions behind the creation of such movements are largely similar.

Sahni identifies the narrative work coming out of the new story movement as introspection-heavy. This work is so closely tied with the writer's being that most of it reflects the subject in isolation from his surroundings. The 'I' becomes the core of the work. This core is marked by existentialist overtones, which can be identified in almost all of the *nayi kahani* works published 1950 onwards. This enables the *nayi kahani* protagonist to seem more isolated in tangled selfhood than other protagonists. This is true of Mannu Bhandari's *Apka Bunty*, as I discuss later.

Yadav agrees with Sahni on the writer's fault in acceding to methods by which he can secure his literary stature but which require him to compromise on representing his authentic experience.

> जो लेखक 'विद्रोही' तो कहलाना चाहे, लेकिन ऐस्टेब्लिशमेंट को नाराज करने का रिस्क न ले, वह मॉम की तरह साफ-सुथरी चीज़ें ही लिखता रहेगा.[34]
>
> The writer who wishes to be called "rebellious", but doesn't take the risk of upsetting the establishment, will continue to write on wax-like clean matters.

The establishment here is the faction that widely controls the writer-citizen's life. Given that Yadav's rebellion is against those who enforce traditions upon younger generations, it is evident that this establishment for him is the previous generation of writers and citizens. The lack of anything 'disturbing' in the writer's work makes his work pseudo-rebellious, solely aimed at winning large audiences. As per him, creative work can be rebellious on three fronts: ethical, political, and religious. His interview and his works argue for his rebellion on the ethical front—

[34] Yadav, interview: 87.

against traditions. In his 1972 introduction to his novel *Sara Akash* (The Whole Sky), he reinstates his comments made in the *Sarika* interview but this time he supports them with examples:

> सामाजिक सुधार करनेवाले युवकों की जो पीढ़ी बीस साल पहले आयी थी, वह अपने यथार्थ से काटकर किसी न किसी मशीन का पुर्जा रह गयी है. परंपरागत विवाह की रस्में अब और जोर से मनाई जाने लगी हैं. (...) मेरा विश्वास दृढ़ होता जाता है कि जब तक विवाह करने की डोर माँ-बाप के हाथों में है (...) दो नितांत अकेलों की यह कहानी तब तक सच है (...).[35]
>
> The generation of young people that arose twenty years ago for social development is now disassociated from reality and has become a part of some machine. Traditional ways of marriage are now celebrated more vigorously. (...) My belief is growing stronger that till the time the strings of marriage remain in the hands of parents (...) this story [*Sara Akash*] of two utterly alone individuals will remain true.

Here, Yadav identifies a major symptom of what could be called modern delirium: the lack of a rigorous, rebellious spirit in the current generation, an inability to stick with the social aims that one starts out with. Exemplifying through the institution of marriage, the 'establishment' here consists of the parents who choose their children's life partners—a precursor to the married men and women's experience of eternal and 'utter' loneliness born out of age-old traditions. Yadav admits that a plea for acceptance underlies the intention to upset the establishment. Here, the 'establishment' is a group of Hindi writers preceding Yadav and his contemporaries. This suggests that what is sought as the ultimate resolution to the tensions that modernity breeds is acceptance by previous generations, a coalition of the past and the present, whose experiences of modernity are radically dissimilar. I note that this ideal synthesis is by nature problematic: that modernity can only be experienced as revolt leading to hard-earned acceptance both over

[35] Rajendra Yadav, *Sara Aakash*, (1952; reis., Radhakrishan Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 2008), 9-10.

simplifies and complicates the definitions of modernity that we have come across so far. It renders the definition of progress as 'values in constant change' and that of modernity as 'a break from traditions' ambiguous. Further testing these definitions would require a more evaluative examination of the writers' evolution through their interviews on other platforms, which is beyond the scope of my project. We can, however, be sure that the literary landscape is painted by the complex relationship between the middle class's desire to be accepted and its rebellion, albeit half-baked, against all that the previous generations stand for.

As I suggested above, Yadav views his *self* as a mirror to the socio-literary world in which he participates. In explicating his personal 'crises', he reflects the crises which engulf the 'literary' world; his reports of his mental state while writing are immediately followed by his views on how various components of the literary world are functioning. He describes his creative process and the literary environment:

> मेरा लेखन सचमुच मेरा अपना युद्ध-क्षेत्र है. रण-क्षेत्र से लौटा हुआ सिपाही आपको क्या बताये? (...) आज का सारा कथा-माहौल असुरक्षा और अस्थिरता की भावना से ग्रस्त है. यह असुरक्षा का भाव आज हमारे चारों ओर व्याप्त है. हम लोग 'जहां हैं' से 'जहां होना चाहिए' के क्राइसिस में फंसा महसूस करते हैं. हर समझौता कहीं तोड़ता ह. संबंधों में संशय उत्पन्न हो चुके हैं, तथा संस्कृति और आध्यात्मिक स्तरों पर अस्थिरता की भावना घर करती जा रही है.[36]
>
> My writing is truly my war zone. What can a soldier returned from the battlefield tell you? (...) Today's literary landscape is laden with the feeling of insecurity and instability. This sense of insecurity prevails all around us. We feel stuck in the crisis of 'where we are' and 'where we should be'. Every compromise breaks us somewhere. Suspicion has seeped into relationships, and the feeling instability is prevailing on cultural and spiritual levels.

[36] Yadav, interview: 87.

This moment is akin to the moment that occurs in all other interviews included in this series, the moment of a clear diagnosis. The conflict between the real present and the ideal present is also a conflict between the past and the past-laden present. The dissonance between the previous generations which uphold traditions and the next generation which tolerates the burden implies that modernity is a state of 'compromise' first and foremost. This idea of the compromise can be extended to understand how Yadav defines his process as a writer. He holds that progress follows the one who is able to deny one's self. All of his writing is not only an attempt to endlessly find himself but also to continually negate his findings, perhaps until he reaches a point of compromise within, from where it is no longer possible to 'meander' any further. In an interview conducted by Lothar Lutze in late 1972/early 1973, Yadav delves into the social 'crises' once again:

> We are in a major cultural crisis. It doesn't matter much if one or two become silent, if their personal capacities run dry. But if a whole generation finds itself incapable of doing anything meaningful, it is an indication of a nation's moral and spiritual crisis. (...) Collectively and individually, we are victims of the disease of waiting for Godot. Whether in life or in waiting, remaining in this state of postponement [of actions like writing] has become our own nature. It may be due to our personal worship of convenience or our own weakness that we have not been able to fulfil any of the promises with which we had started our life and our writing and have given importance only to meandering…[37]

Yadav's Sarika interview, his introduction to *Sara Akash*, and his interview with Lothar Lutze, present the implication that even before compromise, it is this 'meandering' that qualifies the lived experience of modernity. The youth whose rebellious spirit fizzles out in twenty years, the

[37] Rajendra Yadav, interview by Lothar Lutze, *Hindi Writing in Postcolonial India*, 1985: 139. This interview was translated from Hindi to English by Lutze.

writer who is unable to write for his times, and the middle-class people who cannot break ties with the traditions that burden them are all meandering. For some, a false sense of modernity and for others, an active recognition of the compromises they initiate, are all signs of endlessly meandering. This meandering doesn't allow for modernity to reach beyond the skin-deep level of experience. When this meandering is not given form in literary work, it is then understandably a cause of frustration.

Bhandari, on behalf of the writers, diagnoses the 'unsuccessful' condition of the writer who represents his fellow citizens:

> (...) आज का लेखक अपने चारों ओर फैले जीवन की विसंगतियों को चित्रित करने में निहायत असमर्थ सिद्ध हुआ है. (...) आज तक हम जिस मुहावरे और शैली के अभ्यस्त हैं, उसी मुहावरे और शैली में आज के जीवन को उसकी सम्पूर्ण विसंगतियों और विडंबनाओं के साथ चित्रित नहीं किया जा सकता है.[38]
>
> Today's writer is highly unsuccessful in depicting the absurdity of life that surrounds him. (...) The idioms and styles that we are habituated to, those idioms and styles cannot be used to depict today's life with all its absurdity.

It is solely the attachment to traditions that no longer serve their literary and other purposes which is to be blamed for their absence in real rebellion, for their passivity, for their delirium.

Part II

The Novel: Mannu Bhandari's *Apka Bunty* as Diagnosis

The *nayi kahani* authors largely concur in their diagnosis of the Indian middle class in the late 20th century. This segment of the population, they suggest, perpetually 'meanders' in loneliness, fear, and suspicion, never straying far from traditional, established modes of

[38] Bhandari, interview: 87.

existence. It is characterized by an inability to heal itself, despite clear symptoms defining its pseudo-rebellion and constricted life. As a critical voice, the writer diagnoses, while the patient—society—continues to suffer. Deleuze, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, articulates this role: 'the writer makes a diagnosis, but what he diagnoses is the world; he follows the illness step by step, but it is the generic condition of man; he assesses the chances of health but it is the possible birth of a new man.'[39] I argue that Mannu Bhandari, in her novel *Apka Bunty* (Your Bunty), embodies such a writer, diagnosing an entire middle-class generation through the narrative of a nine-year-old boy navigating his parents' divorce. Bhandari's diagnosis of the "entire world" is thus simultaneously a diagnosis of the child (the particular) and the 'generic condition' of the world he represents (the general).

Apka Bunty by Mannu Bhandari presents a nine-year-old boy named Bunty as he navigates his relationship with his divorced parents.[40] The novel begins with a naïve boy who lives with his mother, Shakun, and is unaware of why his father, Ajay, doesn't live with him. He has a vague idea about his parents having a fight, but it is only his neighborhood friend who apprises him of the word "divorce." He is desperate to learn the truth. When he asks his mother, he is only met with her sadness and anger. Shakun's depression becomes his own, yet he dedicates all his time to making her happy. Soon we see Bunty trapped in a crisis: he feels lonely when Shakun meets her future husband, Mr. Doctor. This is a story about a boy who is thrust into a bubble of loneliness, self-doubt, anger, and grief as with each passing day, he loses something close to him. As adults decide on his life, the circumstances render Bunty an utterly

[39] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997), quoted in Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*: 37.

[40] The title of this novel presents us with a puzzle which will be addressed later in this project.

passive figure who tries to mend his relationship with his mother and that of Shakun with Ajay but is always met with despair.

Bhandari meticulously follows Bunty's suffering 'step by step'; within the novel, I identify pivotal conflicts that fundamentally shape his development. I analyze these moments chronologically to maintain the intensification of trauma which is crucial to the construction of Bunty's delirium. This analysis will assess these moments, which expose Bunty's psychological distress through familiar symptoms: profound loneliness, fear, suspicion of the world, and an inability to 'meander' far enough from his predicament. Bhandari herself, in a prefatory note to the novel, frames Bunty as a representation of a societal issue:

> भावना के स्तर पर उद्वेलित और विगलित करनेवाला बंटी जब मेरे सामने एक भयावह सामाजिक समस्या के रूप में आया तो मेरी दृष्टि अनायास ही उसे जन्म देने, बनाने या बिगाड़नेवाले सारे सूत्रों, स्त्रोतों और संदर्भों की खोज और विश्लेषण की ओर दौड़ पड़ी।[41]
>
> When Bunty, causing agitation and meltdown on the level of feeling, came in front of me in the form of a horrifying social problem, my eye searched for all the sources and contexts that gave birth to him, gave form to him or impaired him.

This note establishes two critical points. First, the child protagonist is explicitly a conduit for understanding a larger social malaise. Second, Bunty embodies a self-revelatory quality; his experiences and reactions—the symptoms that merge with his being—illuminate the workings of this social problem.

Deleuze further elaborates on the writer's function in *Critical and Clinical*:

> (...) the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature

[41] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, ix.

> then appears as an enterprise of health (...) The writer returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums. [42]

This passage resonates with Rajendra Yadav's remark (discussed in Part 1): 'What can a soldier returned from the battlefield tell you?'[43] Bhandari's authorial note seems to invert this, asking instead, 'What can a battlefield tell you about the soldier?' Her encounters with real-life parallels to Bunty motivate her examination of the relational "battlefield" that 'makes or breaks' the fundamental condition of what Bunty symbolizes.

I term Bunty a **swiveling protagonist**. Despite being central to the plot, he does not instigate change or transformation externally. He is consistently affected by the adult relationships around him but remains unable to exert a significant reciprocal effect. He swivels and moves around these relationships, while they remain largely unaffected by his presence. He is a reactive force, contingent on the (hyper)activity of adults who continually define and redefine him. The novel's focus on Bunty's viewpoint immerses the reader in his experience, looking out at an external world that neither he nor the reader can alter. My examination of the key episodes aims to establish two things: first, how these episodes reinforce Bunty's invisibility, and second, how this invisibility mirrors the condition of the middle class.

Out of sixteen chapters, thirteen are focused on Bunty's perspective, and three on his mother, Shakun's. Yet, Shakun often appears more visible, as Bunty's gaze is fixated on her. We witness Shakun's depression following her marital breakdown and its profound effect on Bunty. He internalizes his mother's life, either mirroring her sadness or attempting to alleviate it by subtly altering his own behavior. Observing her despondency—gazing at the ceiling or stars—he

[42] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

[43] रण-क्षेत्र से लौटा हुआ सिपाही आपको क्या बताये?, Yadav, interview: 87.

either denies himself happiness in emulation or tries to soothe her. Often, he assumes he is the cause of her sorrow. A child unaware of parental dynamics is trapped in guesswork about his mother's inability to share joy, leading to an early, insidious separation from her, even before he can comprehend its nature. His hope for a future where his mother is happy perpetually displaces him from an ideal present.

> बंटी को कुछ भी समझ में नहीं आया कि वह क्या करे, कैसे ममी को चुप कराए। और जब कुछ भी समझ में नहीं आया तो ममी के गले से लिपटकर खुद भी फफक-फफककर रो पड़ा। "मत रोओ ममी—रोओ मत—"[44]
>
> Bunty didn't understand what he should do, how to stop "mother" from crying. And when he couldn't think of anything, he hugged "mother" tightly and started crying himself. 'Don't cry mother–don't cry–'

His inability to understand the reasons for her sadness creates a double removal; Shakun's lack of communication deepens his confusion. He compensates for emotional distance by seeking physical closeness as he becomes trapped in a cycle of guesswork, guilt, and grief.

Bunty experiences separations that never fully sever him from their objects. His attempt to emotionally distance himself from his mother is one such failed separation. A more comprehensible turning point is his uprooting from his childhood home. The new house never replaces the old, and memories of the latter remain an open wound, existing between the reachable and unreachable. This loss, like others, unfolds through a series of events. Before losing his home, he loses his connection with his father. Interpreting Shakun's sadness as a consequence of his relationship with his father, he sides with his mother, vowing never to even think of his father:

[44] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 71.

> मन ही मन किए हुए प्रॉमिस पर जब पूरी तरह भरोसा नहीं हो पाता तब ज़ोर-ज़ोर से बोलकर प्रॉमिस करता है। अपनी ही आवाज़ सुनकर उसके भीतर एक नया आत्मविश्वास जगता।[45]
>
> He speaks the promise out loud when he cannot completely trust the internally-made promise. When he hears his own voice, a new [form of] self-trust arises.

When Nirmal Verma observes young Indians voicing "so-called rebellious slogans" while failing to embrace modern problem-solving, it suggests that such vocalizations are primarily attempts to derive self-worth. Bunty's aloud promise is an act of self-reassurance, an attempt to play a role in solving his mother's problems. This gesture suggests insufficient internal resolve rather than effective action. Bunty ultimately fails in this self-imposed battle. As disappointments mount, he seeks his father again. This failed promise, a superficial attempt to overcome present limitations, is an accusation leveled against the middle class.

In his work on Deleuze, Aidan Tynan writes, '(...) the inadequacy of our present forms gives rise to an embodied suffering, but this suffering can itself become the principle of the renewal of forms.'[46] Shakun's perpetual sadness (her illness) transfers to Bunty, manifesting in new, sometimes contrary, forms. Her stasis becomes Bunty's orderly routine; her stargazing becomes his observation of life from the school bus; her inability to explain the divorce (negative symptom) becomes his fixation on discussing it (positive symptom). Shakun's contentment after remarrying translates into Bunty's unmanageable temper and unwillingness to accept her new life. The emotional divide persists as Bunty's actions remain negated and fruitless, effecting no change in his relationships. Unable to prevent his valuables from slipping away, he is an isolated figure, excluded from agency. This suffering echoes the middle-class state: both are inadequate

[45] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 73.

[46] Aidan Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 34.

in coping with their (transferred) illness, adding new layers of suffering, especially at moments of loss. Both Bunty and the common citizen are tied to past figures, unable to validate their present lives, fixated on past demands. Bunty sacrifices his desires for his father to meet his mother's perceived needs, thus isolating himself. The middle class enacts its own isolation by remaining invisible, unable to affect the external world. Despite narrating much of the novel, Bunty experiences only "skin-deep" consequentiality; he only responds, never initiating impactful transformation. He is molded by the world and is unable to mold it in return. This association will be explored further when analyzing Bunty's immaterial revolt.

Bunty becomes an inverted mirror image of Shakun. He observes her sadness morph: she becomes silent, lost, sometimes numb. Her turn inward contrasts with Bunty's emotional outbursts. He is hypervigilant of her behavior, even as she becomes increasingly indiscernible. Before a new school session, Bunty authoritatively asks his mother to prepare his books, a usual affair. Upon returning from a friend's, he finds his books untouched and his mother with "Mr. Doctor," a widower familiar to Bunty. His subsequent outburst, seeing his mother preoccupied, reveals his hurt. To label this merely "jealousy" is an oversimplification. It's not just that his mother is with a not-father, not-him figure, but that his own name is no longer her top priority. Amidst his tears and acute awareness of betrayal, Bunty is still oblivious to his trauma's depth. A moment of self-reflection reveals his limited awareness:

> उसे खुद लग रहा है कि यह रोना केवल कवर न चढ़ाने का रोना नहीं है। पता नहीं क्या है की उसे फूट-फूटकर रोना आ रहा है। बहुत दिनों से जैसे मन में कुछ जमा हुआ था, जो एक हलके से झटके से बह आया।[47]

[47] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 90.

> He can feel that his crying is not merely for not having his books ready with covers on them. Don't know what it is that he is weeping for. As if for many days, something inside was frozen, which melted on a slight jolt.

His reaction stems from a desire to reclaim his former place in his mother's life, though he hasn't fully grasped these reasons. Notably, even in this disruption, Bunty isn't rebellious but acts on an instantaneous force releasing accumulated frustration. He doesn't yet intend to upset his mother for attention; thoughts like "is she angry?" indicate his lack of intent to anger her. This is significant, as Bunty later adopts a more calculative approach to expressing his concerns.

The *nayi kahani* writers note that change necessitates the risk of upsetting the 'establishment.' The middle class's disregard for this risk reveals its discomfort with breaking habitual patterns of suffering. Its apparent rebellions are often childish releases of accumulated anger. Bunty temporarily separated his mother from Mr. Doctor but achieved no permanent change in how he was attended to. His outburst is aimed beyond his mother, at the constraints rendering him a sponge-like figure, absorbing effects while being neglected. Their unwillingness to consider his desires negates his existence as an agent capable of affecting his world. Bunty's case reflects the middle-class individual, equally unable to affect his world or reform its structure.

> खाना खाकर बंटी बहार आया तो लगा जैसे भीतर बैठा था तो एक बोझ-सा उस पर लदा था। पता नहीं वह बोझ कवर न चढ़ाने का था कि ममी के नाराज़ होने का था या कि अपने ही व्यवहार का था। जो भी हो, बहार आते ही वह बहुत हलका हो आया और बिस्तर पर लेटते ही सो गया।[48]
>
> When Bunty came out after having dinner, it felt like something was burdening him while he was inside. Don't know if the burden was of not covering his books [on his

[48] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 91.

own] or of mother getting angry or of [his] own behavior. Whatever it was, it felt much lighter after coming out and the moment he lay on his bed, he fell asleep.

Stepping out of the room establishes two things: the outburst's short-lived nature, insufficient for material transformation, and reinforced self-doubt. His mother's silence induces guilt; he feels its negative impact as a "floating heaviness." The writers highlight how the "modern" citizen's inability to break from tradition-heavy constraints manifests a lack of self-trust. After dissent, the individual often recedes into self-sabotage, questioning their propriety. This traps them in a cycle: voicing suffering inconsequentially, temporary relief, questioning dissent, hoping for change, and accepting reality until despair accumulates again.

Amidst lack of self-trust and suffocation from his mother's shifting priorities, Bunty's experience is marked by loneliness. Despite surrendering to his mother's imagined wishes—distancing himself from his father—he feels increasingly disconnected from the only person he considers "his own."

एक ममी ही तो उसकी थीं, पर वे भी उन्हीं लोगों में जाकर मिल गईं।[49]

Mother was the only one his own, but she has joined them.

'Them' refers to Mr. Doctor and his children. His mother transforms from his 'own' to someone exhibiting foreign values. This reinforces his double removal: his mother grows physically distant and emotionally complex, becoming a different version of herself. When he hears his mother laugh at Mr. Doctor's comment, "It seems he [Bunty] husbands you too much!", his concern centers on 'husband.'[50] He thinks she is mocking his father. His disapproval and shame highlight his loneliness:

[49] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 96.

[50] "इट सीम्स, ही हस्बैंड्स यू टू मच!" डॉक्टर ने कहा तो ममी हँसने लगीं। Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 95.

> हाँ, हस्बैंड की बात कर रहें हैं और ममी हँस रही हैं। (...) और ऐसे सबसे करनी चाहिए पापा की बात? ऐसे हँसना चाहिए? वह तो अपने दोस्तों के सामने भी कभी नहीं करता।[51]
>
> Yes, they're talking about "husband" and mother is laughing. (...) And should one talk like this about father with everyone? Should one laugh like this? Not even with his friends does he talk about him.

Bunty's reaction underscores the rigid boundaries of his relationships. Mr. Doctor is an "other"; his mother is his own but so is his father, whom he vowed to forget. This new entity (Mr. Doctor and children) is unwelcome. Gradually, he is stripped of both parents: unable to entertain thoughts of his father, and unable to bear his mother siding against his father with this foreign group. By noting that he doesn't discuss his father even with friends, he marks friends as outside "his own," establishing his complete social removal. The past tense ("Mother was the only one") consciously asserts his companionlessness, confirming his loneliness to himself. This is the penultimate moment of *realizing* his profound isolation, a state which, the reader recognizes, has long existed. The final blow comes when he physically moves to live with his father.

As I suggested earlier, Bunty's experience speaks for the "utterly alone" young Indians, flag-bearers of a quasi-modern, substandard experience. Perhaps the middle-class individual isn't unable to break from tradition, but rather unable to see he's *already* been broken away from—that he, in his temporal present, is already outcast, "other" to the previous generation. The individual is aware of being an outsider to "the past that raised him" (as Sahni phrases it) but the individual cannot accept it.[52] He expends energy on imaginary connections to the past through meaningless traditions, ignoring an expanded range of possibilities.

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[51] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 95-96.

[52] This phrase is discussed in part 1.

For Bunty, this is a breaking point which escalates his suffocation. He decides to contact his father by sending a letter with a drawing, forgetting his promise. Whether he sends it is unknown, but his will to contact his father isn't for support or against loneliness; it's to incite a reaction from his mother, a satisfaction he never achieves. His status as unable to drive change is thus cemented. Kept in the dark about his mother's plans to marry Mr. Doctor and move to his house, the distance between them grows, making his mother seem closer to her new family. This distance materializes as violence: when Bunty throws tantrums over sharing with his to-be-stepbrother, Shakun slaps him. Bunty's reaction is significant; he imagines a near-death experience. In the ensuing silence, he throws his toys, runs outside, and climbs a tree:

> मन हुआ पेड़ पर से कूद पड़े। अपने हाथ-पाँव तोड़ ले। तब ममी को पता लगेगा कि बंटी को चाँटा मारने का क्या मतलब होता है। और उसकी अपनी ही आँखों के सामने अपना पट्टियों से बँधा शरीर घूमने लगा। वह पलंग पर कराह रहा है, सब लोग चारों ओर खड़े हैं। ममी रो रहीं हैं...
>
> (...) और एकाएक ही बंटी फूट-फूटकर रोने लगा। कोई मत आओ उसे बुलाने।
>
> (...) मन हुआ फाटक खोलकर निकल जाए और दौड़ता चला जाए, दौड़ता चला जाए...पर कहाँ?
>
> (...) और इस 'कहाँ' से हारकर वह चुपचाप लौट आया और जब कुछ भी समझ में नहीं आया तो आकर घास पर लेट गया।[53]
>
> Felt like jumping from the treetop. Breaking arms and legs. Then mother will know what it means to slap Bunty. And in front of his own eyes appeared his body in bandages. He is squirming on his bed, everyone is standing around him. Mother is crying…
> And suddenly Bunty started crying. No one to come and call him.
> Felt like dashing through the door and running, running…to where?
> And losing against this "where", he quietly came back and when he couldn't understand anything, he lay down on the grass.

[53] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 103.

This is a first—seeing himself outside his body. Visualizing his almost-demise, he imagines his mother's reaction. This imagined injury follows a real injury to his sense of self. The former isn't the effect of the latter but an attempt to complete the injury-process. When the source of harm is also the source of identity (mother), Bunty loses comprehension of who he is. To restore stability, he must restore his mother as the reliable backbone of his identity. To do this, he must almost-destroy himself to regain the maternal softness he craves. He swivels around the mother-figure.

'The wounding or cracking of the "I" is for Deleuze the very condition of subjectivity, and for this reason personal and physiological disintegration is always an inherent threat.'[54] Despite visualizing bodily harm, this 'disintegration' is more personal than physiological, as he succumbs to survival instinct by not jumping. But the threat remains. This wish for injury is the first in a series of "bursts" of disintegration. This burst of will is juxtaposed with grim passivity:

> बंटी का अपना मन कहीं गहरे में डूबता जा रहा है।
>
> (...) चीख जैसे भीतर ही भीतर घुटकर रह गई।[55]
>
> Bunty's own mind is drowning in some darkness.
>
> (...) As if [his] scream was suffocated inside.

Only Phuphi, the househelp, discerns his suffocation. She expresses disagreement with Shakun's remarriage and forcing Bunty into an inhospitable environment, as she tells Shakun, 'Have you seen the child's face? (...) as if he is melting inside.'[56] Soon, she leaves, marking the exit of Bunty's last proximal support, intensifying his evolving loneliness. This lack of finality,

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[54] Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*, 45.

[55] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 105.

[56] "चेहरा देखा है बच्चे का? (...) जैसे रात-दिन घुलता रहता हो भीतर ही भीतर।" Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 120.

an absence of a definite state, characterizes modernity. Bhandari's *Sarika* interview speaks of 'today's life with all its absurdity,' as modern experience is an evolving state of being-removed from the past. Her diagnosed 'absurdity' corresponds to societal changes so "incurably rampant" that the present cannot speak for itself. This paralysis extends to the writer who cannot write and the citizen who cannot socially advance. Bunty, despite changes, is paralyzed, witnessing his losses. Deleuze and Guattari write in *What is Philosophy?*, 'the present is what we are, the sickness in which we languish, for example, or the inanition which paralyses us. But in another sense, this present passes and thus is not what we are but, rather, what we become, what we are in the process of becoming.'[57] Bunty's distress pushes him further into the spiral of becoming-alone, more intensely isolated than ever before. His thought of running away foreshadows his eventual departure from his mother. Yet, even this physical escape is bound by an expectation of being rescued, an intention not to break from his past but to be resituated in it, proving his paralysis.

After Phuphi leaves, he and his mother move to Mr. Doctor's house. Bunty loses every inch of familiar comfort—his backyard, his territory. The backyard is replaced by a front yard he refuses to garden. When a guest suggests his surname Batra change to Joshi (step-father's), he reacts strongly. His reaction in solitude is more telling:

> फिर सारे दिन वह कागज़ पर अरूप बत्रा...अरूप बत्रा, बंटी बत्रा लिखता रहा था। [58]
>
> Then all day, he wrote on paper Arup Batra…Arup Batra, Bunty Batra.[59]

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[57] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1994), quoted in Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*: 40.

[58] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 129.

[59] Bunty is his nickname and Arup is his proper name.

The image of Bunty drawing for his father is replaced by him repeatedly writing his own full name, clinging to this identity marker. At his most vulnerable, he cannot lose the name tethering him to his past. Changing it would mean its death. Each inscription is a rediagnosis: "utterly alone." Seeing his luggage in a foreign room in a foreign house, he thinks, 'Do things have a face? All our things look so sad.'[60] His capacity to identify with external objects (his house, his belongings, and even his name) shows self-awareness. With his home replaced, Bunty exhibits depressive symptoms. Unlike before, he cannot sleep despite anger and desolation. He laments his losses internally:

> बंटी चाहता भी है की सब कह दे। कितने दिन तो हो गए उसने कुछ कहा ही नहीं। आजकल तो वह सिर्फ़ सुनता है और मान लेता है (...)
>
> बंटी को लगा घर से चला था तो बीच रास्ते में आकर उसका अपना घर और बगीचा छूट गया था। यहाँ आकर ममी छूट गईं।[61]
>
> Bunty wishes to say everything. He hasn't said anything in so many days. These days, he only listens and obeys (...)
>
> Bunty felt that when he started from "home", at midway his own house and garden were left behind. After coming here, mother is left behind.

As estrangement from his new family grows, his verbal engagement decreases. This negative symptom (reduced speech) coincides with a strange sensory experience: imagining his mother's eyes following him, then feeling eyes growing within him. Later in the novel, we see Bunty forced by his suffocation to devise coping methods, like speaking thoughts aloud for comfort.

> बंटी की आँखें एकदम ज़मीन में गड़ी हुई हैं। और वहाँ पहले से ही ममी की दो आँखें चिपकी हुई हैं।

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[60] सामान का भी चेहरा होता है क्या? सारा सामान कैसा उदास-उदास लग रहा है। Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 131.

[61] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 134-135.

(...) टप-टप उसकी अपनी आँखों के आँसू ममी की आँखों में टपकने लगे और दोनों के आँसू मिल गए।[62]

Bunty's eyes are absolutely fixed on the ground. And there, mother's two eyes are already stuck.

(...) drop by drop, tears from his own eyes drop into mother's eyes and tears of both are blended together.

This displacement of sadness onto his mother can be read in two ways: either her shared grief is now apparent to him, or, lacking her overt grieving for him, he forges an image of her doing so. This projection keeps her near and in shared misery. Neither reading fully explains the disintegration of his 'I'; it's more an integration of his mother's identity with his. Only when "inner eyes" perceive more deeply than his real eyes do we find traces of his self fragmenting. This pattern will become clearer as the novel intensifies Bunty's psychic breakdown.

After days of dreariness, hope arises when Mr. Doctor proposes solo time with Bunty. Bunty's excitement suggests his view of Mr. Doctor is shifting from "mother-snatcher" to a potential source of acceptance. He notes the blurring distinction between his father and stepfather: "I wander this wildly when father comes too. Today, the faces of father and Mr. Doctor are merging."[63] When Mr. Doctor cancels due to a friend's heart attack, Bunty feels cheated, unable to grasp external urgencies. He breaks his silence, throwing things in his mother's room. She slaps him a second time. Bunty repeats his earlier reaction, desiring escape, but this time he does run away:

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[62] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 154.

[63] पापा आते हैं तब भी वह इसी तरह पगलाया-पगलाया फिरता है। आज पापा और डॉक्टर साहब के चेहरे भी तो घुल-मिल जा रहे हैं। Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 157.

खड़ा-खड़ा सड़क देखता रहा। भीतर जाने की इच्छा नहीं हो रही। भीतर वह जाएगा भी नहीं। बस सड़क पर ही दौड़ता चला जाएगा—दौड़ता चला जाएगा। पर कहाँ? लेकिन इस बार यह कहाँ भी उसे रोक नहीं सका और वह सचमुच दौड़ पड़ा। दौड़ते-दौड़ते जब वह अपने घर के फाटक पर पहुँचा तो उसकी साँस फूली हुई थी, पता नहीं दौड़ने से, पता नहीं डर से।[64]

…he stood there gazing at the road. [He] isn't feeling like going inside. He won't go inside. He will go running on the road, he will keep running. But where? But this time this "where" could not stop him and he truly ran. When he reached the gate of his own [old] house, he was short of breath, could be because of running, could be because of fear.

He feels his action causes his mother stress—stress over him. But when no one comes, he grows fearful, climbs a tree hoping to spot someone, and again wishes to fall and injure himself. No bandaged body this time; plausibly, he wishes for death, or at least her attention, even in death.

उपेक्षा...अपमान...मन हुआ ऊपर से कूद पड़े। ख़ूब घाव हो जाएँ, हार्ट-अटैक...उसके आँसू ममी के गालों से बहने लगे, 'बंटी-बंटी!'[65]

Neglect…insult…wished to fall from atop. May many wounds occur, heart-attack…his tears flow from mother's eyes, "Bunty-Bunty!"

Aidan Tynan remarks, 'If traumas and symptoms are repeated as if they were desirable, this is because they provide the means of living that which is otherwise unlivable, means of living the unlivable itself.'[66] The first time, his desire-symptoms were: wish to run away, be harmed, and arouse his mother's sadness over him. The second time, he actualizes these. He runs away, causes his mother distress (she eventually finds him, distraught), and actualizes his wish for injury by smashing his beloved plants—a symbolic death of his past, another fracture in his "I." The

[64] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 159.

[65] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 161.

[66] Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*, 50.

repetition provides an opportunity to witness his mother reinstating him, a condition achievable only through repeated physical and psychological pain. His rebellion is a plea for her attention.

In his interview, Yadav admits his rebellious intentions in protesting against his literary progenitors:

> पुरानी पीढ़ी नयी की या नयी पीढ़ी पुरानी की अवहेलना करे, बात एक ही है। (...) ईमानदारी के क्षणों में हमें यह नहीं लगता कि पुरानी पीढ़ी को नकारने में हमारी यह प्रवृत्ति नहीं थी कि वे हमारे अस्तित्व को स्वीकार लें।[67]
>
> Whether the previous generation disregards the new generation or vice versa, it is the same thing. (...) In moments of truth, we feel that in repudiating the previous generation was our inclination toward being accepted by them for our identity.

Yadav's framing of literary rebellion extends to social traditions and intergenerational conflict. At its heart lies frustration—of the Hindi writer and the young societal member whose modern experience differs drastically from that of the previous generation. If his rebellion is partly a desire to move forward and partly to regain the older generation's confidence, it's only partly Bunty's. Bunty's extreme case is a possible future for disenchanted youth: If repudiation causes unparalleled trauma, demanding a complete break from the past, the modern individual might occupy Bunty's position.

Finally, I reflect on the finality of Bunty's 'personal' disintegration. Despite regaining his mother's attention (her loving check-ins), he doesn't regain carefree existence. Her eyes follow him, sometimes glued to objects or his body. He feels only their presence. Realizing Bunty cannot be rescued from his grief, Shakun calls Ajay (his father) to take him. Bunty's acceptance is unsurprising, proving his ineptitude at altering his thought process:

[67] Yadav, interview: 87.

और जब थोड़ी देर बाद बुलाकर, पापा ने प्यार से अपनी गोद में बिठाकर पूछा, 'बेटा, हमारे साथ कलकत्ता चलोगे न? मैं तुम्हें लेने आया हूँ।' तो ममी की ओर देखते-देखते ही गुस्से में ऐसे बोला जैसे पापा को नहीं, ममी को जवाब दे रहा हो, "जरूर चलूँगा, मैं यहाँ बिलकुल नहीं रहूँगा।" यह बात उसने हज़ार-हज़ार बार ममी को ही तो केहनी चाही है। अच्छा है, ममी भी सुन लें।[68]

And when a little while later, father made him sit on his lap and asked lovingly, "dear, you will go with me to Kolkata, right? I have come to take you," he [Bunty] looked at his mother and said so bitterly as if he was not responding to father but to mother, 'I will definitely go, I will not stay here at all.' He had wanted to say this to mother many times. Good, mother should hear it.

Bunty's efforts to reach Shakun are masked by his escapes. He fashions a way of feeling pain that drives him to "repeat" trauma, but each attempt to find home in his mother fails more miserably. His failure intensifies, widening the gap between his perceived identity and his self-perception. This disjuncture marks the ultimate break: 'amidst so many strangers, he has become a stranger to himself.' Now, his mother's following eyes become his own; he sees himself from outside.

पता नहीं कैसे क्या हुआ की उसके भीतर दो आँखें और उग आईं और उसके बाद से ही सब कुछ गड़बड़ हो गया। बाहर की आँखों से वह एक चीज़ देखता है तो भीतर की आँखें दूसरी चीज़ देखने लगती हैं।[69]

He doesn't know how it came to be that two more eyes have grown inside of him after which everything went haywire. He looks at one thing from his external eyes and his internal eyes begin looking at another.

This "another," the object of his internal eyes, is an amalgam of fears (being alone) and memories. Soaked in environmental changes, he is also soaked in his lingering past. Everything is filtered through "how it used to be." His expression becomes internal; when he cries, only

[68] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 165.

[69] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 189.

inner eyes cry. This suggests emotional paralysis, his inability to express outwardly, curbed by the absurdity of his time. This is the state the *nayi kahani* writers claim: emotionally moved yet physically unmovable, unable to express, to write.

Uprooted again, his acceptance isn't active decision-making. He is receptive, hoping his mother will stop him out of resentment. When this doesn't happen, he must leave. In Kolkata with his father ("In this house, has father become mother?"), he feels like a floater.[70] This house and his relationship with his father are unfamiliar and he loses the last strand of familiarity with his mother, expected to forge one with his father. This shift is followed by another: his father leaves him at a boarding school.

> और पता नहीं बंटी को क्या हुआ कि पापा जाएँ उसके पहले वही पापा को छोड़कर दौड़ पड़ा है। वह दौड़ता जा रहा है, बिना पीछे मुड़े—बस आगे ही आगे।[71]
>
> And not knowing what happened, before father can leave, Bunty starts running. He keeps running, without looking back—only ahead.

This not 'looking back' and 'only ahead' should not be mistaken as Bunty's final break from his past. It is instead what Verma calls 'a departure from the known.'[72] He may be in the *process* of dissociating his self from the sources of trauma, but he is by no means cured of his delirium. He continues to be a patient of psychic disintegration as his 'inner eyes' absorb what his real eyes cannot—the destructive desire to be accepted by those whom he runs away from.

The middle-class Indian citizen of 1970s *is* the swiveling Bunty. While the interviews are a report of the middle-class diagnosis, the novel *Apka Bunty* is a palpable exposition of the

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[70] "इस घर में पापा ममी बन गए?" Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 193.

[71] Bhandari, *Apka Bunty*, 207.

[72] This phrase is discussed in part 1.

dynamic illness. Bunty's traumatic childhood is a testament to the childish figure of the modern Indian citizen who cannot claim an active position by dismembering his self from the madness of modernity. Like Bunty, this citizen is uncapable of accepting his alienation and strives to be recognized by well-established units of society (parents, previous generations, the past). This renders his existence reactive. Instead of driving change, he reinforces 'establishments.' In his invisibility, he carries out pseudo-rebellions to become visible.

As Tynan writes, 'The artist, says Deleuze, can thus "treat" the world as a symptom, and build his work not like a therapeutic, but in every case like a clinic. The artist is not outside the symptoms, but makes a work of art from them.'[73] The writers are diagnosing their selves as much as they are diagnosing their external world which becomes the object of their literary works. They are physicians of themselves before they are physicians of the world. As Bhandari diagnoses the child suffering the brunt of "skin-deep modernity," she diagnoses herself and her contemporaries of suffering from the same generational trauma and inactivity. The writers are far from reporting on their condition from an outside position. They acknowledge their entrenchment and their symptoms of being ultimately insecure, unstable, and isolated.

"Apka Bunty," the title (Your Bunty), reflects the intensity of Bunty's passivity. He is not his own person but is eternally somebody else's. He belongs neither to his temporal present nor to his past and in grappling with his isolation, he becomes tantalized by his past. His life is a representation of the Indian citizen's perennial quest for belonging in a dysfunctional modern world. Simultaneously, he runs away from and toward an intangible past and in this maze of misleading modernity, he runs *only ahead*.

[73] Tynan, *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*, 61.

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